

# Controversial 'Politics of Heroin' to Be Filmed

BY CHARLES CHAMPLIN

Times Entertainment Editor

"The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," a controversial new book charging U.S. complicity through the CIA—in the drug trade, has been acquired as the basis for a new film by Richard Brooks for Columbia Pictures.

The book, written by a young Yale scholar named Alfred W. McCoy and two associates, Cathleen B. Read and Leonard P. Adams II, first came to public attention last year when it became known that the CIA tried to dissuade Harper & Row from publishing it and then demanded the opportunity to read and review the text in galley form.

Despite a long rejoinder from the CIA, Harper & Row published the book in September essentially as written. McCoy's central thesis is that the U.S. government, inheriting the vacuum left by the departing French in Southeast Asia, also reluctantly inherited the politics of poppy-growing in the Golden Triangle of Laos, Thailand and Burma, where 70% of the world supply of illicit heroin is produced. The revenues enrich local economies and greatly enrich very high officials of Asian governments supported by the United States in its attempts to combat the spread of communism.

## Battle in Opium War

McCoy's book is a meticulously documented look at the heroin trade worldwide, written in news-magazine rather than pedantic style and containing a few scenes which could make even "The French Connection" seem like a pale footnote.

Most particularly, McCoy describes a battle in the Opium War of 1967 over a caravan of mules carrying 16 tons of opium to market. The shipment was destined for the commander-in-chief of the Laotian army, but two former Kuomintang generals who had been controlling the local trade routes attacked with several hundred men. Eventually the battle involved seven jet aircraft and a company of Laotian paratroopers, who captured the booty.

Brooks, fascinated by these goings-on and by the whole curious confrontation of American idealism and pragmatism with a notably sordid political reality, will call his movie "Flowers of Evil" and plans to shoot entirely on location. Second unit work on the planting of the poppies will begin in a few weeks' time.

## The Truth? 'Tell It'

"I read an excerpt from the book in Harper's and clipped it out," Brooks says. "I read the book and was even more interested, but I couldn't believe that any studio would dare to tackle material that tough. But Columbia was interested, too. I said, 'I want to tell the truth' and Stanley Schneider said, 'Tell it.'"

McCoy's book also suggests that American solicitation of Mafia support during the invasion of Sicily during World War II, at a time when the organization had been under severe harassment by the Mussolini government, gave the Mafia a power base from which it was able to enter the drug trade on a major scale in the postwar period.

McCoy, 27, will serve as a technical adviser to Brooks on his production.

"It won't be a documentary," says Brooks. "In

the nature of things, I'm afraid it can't be. But it will tell the truth about an incredible situation."

McCoy testified last summer before a congressional committee about his researches into the reluctant complicity of American agents with the drug traffic, which included, he charges, the use of Air America, a CIA charter carrier operating in Southeast Asia, to haul raw opium. The charge has been denied.

The shocking rise in addiction among GIs serving in Vietnam focused attention on the equally shocking contradiction in U.S. postures.

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